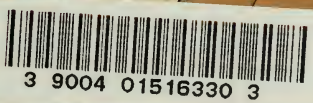
F5012
1889
H567C4



CHRISTIANITY

IN ITS RELATION TO

The State and the Church.

TWO SERMONS

Preached in St. Andrew's Church, Ottawa,
on April 7th and April 14th, 1889,

— BY —

REV. W. T. HERRIDGE, B.D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

LP
F5012
1889
H567C4

OTTAWA:
PRINTED BY A. S. WOODBURN, ELGIN STREET.
1889.

1207227

PREFATORY NOTE.

The following Sermons are the second and third of a series of three,—the subject of the first, which was largely extempore, and therefore not capable of satisfactory reproduction, being "Christianity in its relation to Social Life." The main thought amplified in it, and carried forward into the other two is, that Christianity is the projection into the actual life of every age of the Spirit of Jesus.

In yielding to the request for the publication of these Sermons, I have had no leisure for revision. As they were delivered in the ordinary course of pulpit ministrations, and with no thought of a subsequent use being made of them, they may discover some defects of form, which, had circumstances permitted, I should have been glad to amend.

W. T. HERRIDGE.

I. CHRISTIANITY AND THE STATE.

PREACHED SUNDAY EVENING APRIL 7TH, 1889.

"*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*"—Amos, 3:3.

THE obvious answer is that two cannot walk together except they be agreed. There are those who hold that religion and politics, or—to put the matter in concrete form—Church and State have such widely separated if not antagonistic functions, that they move in totally different directions, and are to be viewed in totally different ways. The proposition which, on the coutrary, I shall endeavor to establish is this, that while Church and State are quite distinct from each other, and in a certain sense mutually independent, yet the highest tasks of each are harmonious, so that it is possible for them to strive concurrently to reach the same goal, the establishment among men of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are discerning more fully the penetrative force of Christianity in every domain of human life. Its principles are such that they cannot for any long time be shut up to this or that corner of our nature. They seek admission at the gate of every avenue which the foot of man may tread, and oblige us to declare our attitude in regard to them. We cannot capriciously decide that we shall be Christians in the Church on Sunday, and heathen in our daily affairs throughout the rest of the week; that in discussing any question, we shall assume a moral standpoint when it seems expedient to do so, but when the wind blows the other way, shall feel perfectly free to change with it. This two-sided policy in the end is found impracticable. The conviction forces itself with growing clearness upon thoughtful minds, that in the very nature of things, our Christianity must be everything to us, or it will soon become nothing at all.

If, then, Christianity asserts its claim to acceptance or rejection in every domain of life, the issue must be met in the

realm of politics where, in view of the importance of many of the questions involved, its presence may be needed most. It is a pity that that fine word "politics" should have been narrowed and degraded by some of the uses made of it to-day. Politics is the science of Government. It concerns itself with everything which can minister to the welfare of the state, which can guard it from foreign aggression or internal discord, which can develop its resources and increase its prosperity, which can encourage the thrift and contentment, the honour and sobriety of its citizens, and give to every man the fullest opportunity to bring out the best that is in him for the service of his home, of his country, of his God. Magnificent indeed is the scope of politics, and I do not wonder that the noblest minds of the ancient world addressed themselves to the task of ascertaining its duties and discovering if they could the most favorable circumstances under which they could be fulfilled. It is our own fault that the word has come to be used in lower significations. When we say that two men are "talking politics," we often mean that they are simply wrangling over some mere party question, or perhaps, discussing some scheme which is intended to be for their own advantage. Whether a system of Government by party tends to encourage a one-sided view of national affairs, and a half-unconscious selfishness, it is not for me here to say. The probability no doubt is, that whether formal parties existed or not, differences of opinion would be inevitable, and that to whichever side he leaned, the parasite would cringe, the true patriot would assert his freedom.

Remembering, therefore, that politics is the science of Government, and that this or that special theory or line of action is not inevitably bound up with it at all, the proper attitude of the Church and the Christian ministry in regard to politics ought to be beyond debate. If the political arena is inevitably of such a character that, do what we will, it must still deserve a measure of the opprobrium, which from some quarter or other is continually being heaped upon it, then the contention of certain purists would be a just one, that every good man should come out from among them and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing. If no one can be a politician who is not prepared to resign the exercise of private judgment, and through thick

and thin to follow the Shibboleths of a party, then we may well desire to destroy our politicians in order that we may keep our men. The pulpit is not the place in which the relative merits of parties is to be discussed, or their distinctive tenets unfolded. But it seems to me that the religious teacher is incompetent who does not fearlessly expound those principles of public justice, morality and truth, which should mark alike every difference of personal opinion, and which are not otherwise in the realm of politics than in any other domain of life. The minister is told that he should mind his own business, and this *is* his business if he has any at all. There are those who seem to imagine that preaching the Gospel means repeating and enforcing a set of theological formulas for the guidance of that portion of the community who may chance to favor them. Nay, the preaching of the Gospel is something infinitely more than that: it is the application of the eternal laws of righteousness, which are built into the fabric of the universe, and revealed in all their glory in Jesus Christ, it is, I say, the application of these eternal laws to the whole being of man. Christianity is no special cult for a select few whose inclinations run that way. "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." It may be that the affairs of party bulk too largely in the thought and action of the electorate. My impression is that they certainly do. But there is still need to be reminded of the highest duties of citizenship, of the responsibility involved in the possession of a franchise, of the almost incalculable power which belongs to the great body of the people to make or mar the future of this Dominion. While "politics" of a certain sort is presented before us almost *ad nauseam*, there is little enough of that nobler politics, which, setting aside all mere personal interests or party prejudices, leads us to consider thoughtfully not only the material but the moral welfare of the State. In this sense, it is the duty of every man to be a politician, and the safeguard of every politician to be a Christian.

To take this attitude in regard to the matter is virtually to enforce the proposition with which I set out, namely, that Chuch and State, while entirely distinct, and in the exercise of their

respective functions mutually independent, ought to be harmonious in regard to the goal towards which their common efforts tend, and so ought to find no difficulty in walking together because they are agreed. It is true, unhappily, that the Church and Christianity are by no means interchangeable terms, as I shall endeavour to show next Sunday evening. The indictment of anti-Christian tendencies made against any state is not necessarily proven because it runs counter to the mandate of ecclesiasticism. But since the Church, whatever may be her failings and errors, is the Divinely appointed illustrator of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the imperfect manner in which she performs her mission by no means absolves us, in practical affiairs, from giving her the respect which is her due, still less justifies us in ignoring the great fundamental religious principles of which she is the perpetual witness, when we come to consider what are the highest interests and what the noblest tasks for the future of our young country.

Before the great turning point in human affairs, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the history of the Church of God was the history of one particular people, the ancient Jews. In their annals there is no vestige of the distinction between Church and State such as we find everywhere among nations which have received the Christian law. When we examine the institutions of the Mosaic economy, we find that they comprehend everything necessary for forming a civil government; not only precepts in regard to the conduct and morals of the people, and the public and private offices of religion, but also laws regulating the formalities of private contracts, inheritance, succession and kindred matters, fixing the limits of jurisdiction, and the respective functions of courts by law, appointing the method of procedure in trials, and awarding the punishments to the several classes of crime. In this ancient state, however, we find that what concerns religion forms an essential, or rather the principal part. Everything in their constitution seems to act in subserviency to this great end, the preservation of the purity of their faith and worship. And how was this state of affairs made possible? Simply because God was acknowledged as the supreme ruler of the people, in Whom originated all the laws for the guidance of their national life. The state thus being a Theocracy, as long as they remained faithful in their allegiance to Jehovah, they never conceived of a

distinction between civil and religious rights, or of a two-sided policy, in the one case for the Government and in the other for the worship of the nation. Church and State were clearly identical.

But the growing apostasy of Israel soon destroyed this ideal condition of affairs, and exchanged the sovereignty of God for the caprice of a wayward and rebellious people. While the prophets and leaders of religious thought strove to stem the current of iniquity and to re-call the nation to its earlier peace, the conduct of the vast majority was widening the chasm between religion and the national life, until their union, except in name, became an utter impossibility. We know by what bitter chastisements, and by what long and sad captivity the lesson was taught, that no people can break away from their allegiance to the laws of God without sooner or later encountering the stern Nemesis of apostasy in remorseful sorrow, in shameful humiliation, aye, perhaps, in irremediable ruin.

The Theocracy, therefore, was gone and gone forever—a magnificient experiment frustrated by the rebellion of human hearts. The Church and State could no longer walk together, much less be identified, because they were not agreed. Henceforth their agreement, whether little or much, was to be determined not by Divine pre-arrangement, but altogether by the character of those who composed them. We know with what steady persistency Christ sought to undeceive the men of His day in the ambitious hopes which some of them entertained in regard to the mission of the Messiah. We may pardon the patriotism of their idle dream that, perhaps, He would restore the splendour of Israel's golden age, and like a greater and more successful Maccabees, achieve the independence of His native land. But a single answer of His was the death blow of all such expectations. "My kingdom is not of this world." It is true that He acknowledged Himself a law-giver, but His laws were for the inner realm of the heart. It is true that He came to restore the ancient Holy of Holies, but only by the purification of character. It is true that His task was one of conquest, that He was in truth a king, but His victories were to be won against the spiritual forces which war against the human soul, and His kingdom was to be righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Therefore, so far from inciting His

followers to rebellion even against the foreign yoke which so enthralled them, He says: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

It is a significant fact that Christ did not attempt again that identification of political and religious life which was seen for a time in the Jewish Theocracy. The whole spirit and temper of His teaching enforces this solemn truth so amply illustrated by the career of ancient Israel, that such an identification is worse than useless unless the heart consent to it; that the religious motive must arise not from a law on the statue book but from a law within; that Christianity, in its very nature, must be a stranger to every form of compulsion save the compulsion of that moral force which finds its way into the citadel of Conscience, and so far from leading to slavery, releases the inner Kingdom of the soul from the bondage of sin, and translates it into the glorious freedom of the sons of God.

While, however, it is a significant fact that the New Testament recognizes the entirely separate functions of Church and State, and gives no hint that it ever desires, on earth at least,* their future identification, it is equally significant that it does not neglect to make clear that the true functions of each are in perfect harmony. The Christian is to be loyal to the civil power, is to "submit himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," and not to join those who flippantly "despise government," and "are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." But if unhappily the State has so far misunderstood its office as to require him to do that of which his conscience disapprove, the issue is perfectly plain: he must obey God rather than men. But such an antagonism between civil and religious duty cannot possibly occur when the State is governed as it ought to be. Rulers are intended not to be a terror to good workers, but to the evil, and if reversing this position, they become a terror to the good and an encouragement to the evil, they have so completely outraged their functions as the stewards of God, that they must be called by some other name. The Christian, then, is to vindicate his right to the title by loyalty, by honour, by obedience to the laws of truth. And the Statesman is to vindicate *his* right to the title by consulting for the moral as well as

* St. John's New Jerusalem is a picture of an Ideal Theocracy.

the material interests of the people, and neither practising himself nor requiring of others anything which he believes would be contrary to the will of God, from whom came alike both Church and State, and who desires them both to have their place as teachers in the school of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The course of post-Apostolic history would have been far different from what it is, if the simple principles which they laid down, in regard to the relation between Christianity and politics had been obediently received and faithfully practised. Instead of that, there have been confusion and entanglements placing now the Church and now the State in the gravest peril, and suggesting so many seemingly insoluble problems that not a few thoughtful men of our own time are contending that the easiest way of emerging from the labyrinth is to abandon altogether the theory that Church and State have anything in common at all, and to declare their absolute separation not simply in their respective functions, but in their origin, their methods, and their destined goal. On the one hand, history presents to us the spectacle of the State absorbed in the Church and the virtual creation of a Church-State, in which the real power, both in civil and religious matters sat on the throne of ecclesiasticism. What has been the paralyzing influence of such a perverted condition of affairs, no students of the career of nations need be told, how the professed followers of Him who declared that His Kingdom was not of this world, have usurped political control, and fettered the freedom of a whole peopeople ; how at the priestly nod, the obnoxious ruler has fallen, and the heroic patriot been put out of the way ; how the temple of God which ought always to be a house of prayer has been turned literally into a den of thieves ! And then, on the other hand, history presents to us the opposite spectacle of the Church absorbed in the State, or, at least, through the creation of a State Church, practically dictating what shall be the orthodox faith and worship, and thus putting a ban upon individual liberty. Account for it as we may, the fact is beyond dispute, that no Church established by the Government of the country, however broad and liberal its doctrines may be, has proved itself equal to the task of measuring the whole religious life of the community. Whether the established church of a nation has been Romanist

or Protestant, the religious thought of the people—to say nothing of the dissent of scepticism—has seemed to render non-conformity in greater or less degreee inevitable. The Church of Rome, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, may retain these titles through courtsey as by law established, but they cannot claim them as a moral right, or even as a correct representation of the real facts of the matter. There is plenty of vigorous religious life in England which does not subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles; there is no inconsiderable part of Scottish worship outside the place of the Establishment; aye even in Rome itself, there are a growing few who do not bow to the decrees of the Vatican. There is no merit, we must remember, in dissent which is made simply for the sake of dissenting. The question of merit is a somewhat difficult one for us to determine at all, and lies rather with the individual conscience and God. That there are some advantages arising from a State-Church, no one who is not blinded by prejudice can deny. Even by an exaggeration of the truth, it keeps in view the ethical functions of the commonwealth. In the midst of the turbulence of atheistic forces, it has often been the only reminder that God was the true Sovereign of the nation, and has thus proved a bulwark against the rising tide which would otherwise have desolated the land. It can scarcely be doubted that a false individualism has sometimes precipitated dissent, and exalted into a question of stern duty that which after all was only the protest of egotism and Pharisaic self-righteousness. But, however this may be, it still remains true that in the very nature of the case, and not necessarily through any fault of its construction, a religious system dictated to us by some one else, though receiving the solemn assent of King or Emperor, and ratified as orthodox by the government of the land, must find itself too narrow, no matter how broad it may be—to contain the multitudinous, and if you choose to add, the untrained and imperfect religious emotions of the throbbing life of humanity.

We cannot wonder, then, that with the lessons of the past before us, one of the characteristics of this age should be its refusal, as a general rule, to accept either a Church-State, or a State-Church as the final arbiter of its religious destiny. This resistance has had its legitimate and likewise its dangerous

manifestations. When one man says, "Keep the Church and State separate," he means, "Let us not permit liberty of worship according to the dictates of conscience to be curtailed, either by the ban of ecclesiastic or the enactments of civil authority." And when anyone takes that ground, whether our ideas of freedom agree with his or not, I think he ought to have our sympathy. But when another man says: "Keep the Church and State separate," he means something wholly different from this. He means that the State is a non-religious institution, and that it has no business with ethical questions at all. He desires not the right to worship, but the right, if he should be so disposed, to overthrow worship, the right to ignore all moral claims, and—though he may not see at once the issue of such a policy.—the right to usher in the reign of terror. The significance of the radical cry depends on the character of him who utters it. Socrates, Savonarola, Luther, these were radicals. Their conscience would not allow them to be otherwise. So, too, were the barbarian hordes who overthrew the shrines of the divinities. So, too, was the Parisian populace who worshipped La Guillotine; so, too, was the brutal Judæan mob, who released Barabbas, and crucified the Son of God. On both sides you might say that the cry was against the Church. But in the one case it was the cry of freedom, in the other the cry of anarchy and death!

It must never be forgotten that the state, equally with the Church, is a Divine institution, originating in the thought of God, and that without, at least, some recognition of its theistic origin it cannot, as history abundantly proves, maintain its place at all. It may seem at first sight a somewhat harmless thing to say that the State is non-religious in its character. But what does this mean? The State has a will and an intelligence, and cannot be shielded behind an impersonal "it." "Non-religious," really means atheistic. In view of the august claims of Christianity, there is no other logical halting place; and we know what has been the fate of those nations which have dared to try *that* experiment. We must make a distinction, of course, between religion and theology. It is not the business of the State to formulate elaborate confessions of faith, to determine the bounds between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, to commit itself to the tenets or become subservient to the special purposes of any sect what-

ever. Its Christianity should be rather the common Christianity of all classes of the people, irrespective of race or creed ; and it should recognize the binding power of this common Christianity, over every department of its widespread operations. The State thus comes to have a voice, and ought to raise it in connection with all practical matters which in any way affect the moral interests of the people. It ought not to require the nation or any of its own officers to do what Christianity forbids, nor forbid them doing anything which Christianity enjoins. It is quite competent to establish religious instruction in the public schools of the land, to maintain a just and upright code of social ethics, to seek by every means to secure for everyone, except in cases of necessity or mercy, the freedom of the day of rest. Nor need it be feared that attention to such practical matters as are likely to be pressed upon the mind of every statesman who accepts the fundamental principles of Christianity, will lead to a confusion between the respective duties of Church and State. The one will be needed to keep alive and guide those moral and religious impulses, without which the legal enactments of the other, however excellent, are more than valueless. Each is supreme within its own domain, each necessarily exclusive of the other, yet both mutually helpful and thoroughly harmonious. For Christianity, as I have already said, presents itself over the whole plane of human life. It is not a piece of ecclesiastical machinery to be handled only by priests and ministers. It is a vital truth of God revealed to all men, and challenging the test of all men at home and abroad, in private and in public, in the Church and in the nation ; designed for the multitudinous interests of this world, and the unspeakable blessedness of the world to come.

In presence of the two great creeds and nationalities which make up our Dominion, no one can deny that the problem alike of Church and State is rendered more complex, and that it becomes especially needful to apprehend clearly their respective functions and conduct them both to their noblest goal. If we allow ourselves to be governed by the policy of past ages, we shall not require even an incidental pretext for beginning a war of mutual extermination until one race or the other is destroyed, and the victorious party establishes its faith as the only permissable one throughout the length and breadth of the land. But no sane man,

I imagine, will advocate that course of procedure. Has not the question of supremacy been decided long ago when upon the Plains of Abraham, two armies, equal in valour and patriotism stood in battle-array, and God in His Providence decreed that not the Celt but the Anglo-Saxon should be ruler of this western world? What then? Look again to the heights of the old historic city, and tell me if that double monument to Wolfe and Montcalm, the vanquisher and the vanquished, does not seem to suggest the unique mission of our citizenship, to weld together in a common love and a common loyalty, French and English, Romanist and Protestant, so that unitedly they may achieve the ambition of every true heart amongst us—the peace, the prosperity, the national renown of this our great Dominion. I cannot believe that the moral power of the community is at such a low ebb that we must needs repeat the tactics of mediævalism, that our best weapons must be fiery denunciation and childish Francophobia, that despairing Protestants forsooth, must flee for refuge to the outstretched wings of the southern bird of liberty. While holding firmly to the religious principles which are our ancentral heritage, we can afford to have some thought for our fellow citizens, who are equally loyal to their own. Believing as we do that many of their views are false and injurious, and that the political encroachments of Ultramontanism are to be resisted as perilous to the freedom of the State, let us at the same time do justice to the elements of truth which it is our destined task, if we are faithful, to emancipate from the network of error which now entangles them; let us give our Roman Catholic brethren an opportunity of observing a somewhat rare virtue in past religious history, and a rare enough virtue, alas! in their own attitude toward ourselves, the virtue of doing unto others as we would have others do unto us, and instead of being overcome of evil, overcoming evil with good.

II. CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH.

PREACHED SUNDAY EVENING APRIL 14th, 1889.

"*That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.*"—II Tim. I, IV.

THAT good thing committed to Timothy was the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; and this is the birthright which, handed down from generation to generation to all Christians and to all Churches, imposes upon them the solemn duty of showing what Christianity really is. In so far as they guard this treasure under the controlling impulse of the Spirit of God, they are fulfilling their Divine mission. In so far as they prove recreant to their trust, and turn aside to alien pursuits and alien ambitions, they entirely misconceive their true function, and whether they are sensible of it or not, serve to bring into reproach that sacred Name which, when lifted up before the world's gaze in all its purity and compassion, will draw all men unto Him.

Christianity is valuable only according to the measure of its vital power over human lives to day. No one, I imagine, can read the record of the Evangelists without feeling that they describe the career of One who spake as never man spake before, who thought as never man thought before, who acted as never man acted before. No one, I imagine, can withold some measure of admiration from the character of Jesus of Nazareth. But however inspiring that piece of ancient history might be which is contained in the New Testament, we know how impressions fade under the corroding influence of time, and at length, it may be, vanish altogether. Unless the Christ of the Gospels can in some real way be transferred from the Scriptures into the actual life of man from age to age, we can have no assurance that He will occupy a permanent place of indisputable pre-eminence among the world's great ones. And it is because our Lord Himself knows the ease of forgetfulness that, before He quits the earth, He doubly

provides for the perpetuation of his memory. He inaugurates the Church : He leaves the legacy of His Holy Spirit. Calling now this one, and then that one from their ordinary tasks, He forms at length an inner circle of Twelve Apostles whom He patiently and lovingly instructs as to the meaning of His mission, and then sends them forth, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." And when, sorrowing that He was so soon to leave them, the disciples' hearts seemed almost paralysed by hopelessness and fear, He comforted them, in effect, after this fashion ; "If this were indeed the last of me, and the last of my presence with you, then might sorrow well fill your hearts. But though I go away in person, I remain in spirit. I will not leave you orphans." The magnetism of bodily companionship which after all is confined to one place at any one time was to be exchanged for something infinitely greater, the majesty of an Omnipotent Spirit who will move not only by the little lake of Galilee, but by the sounding shore of the great ocean of life ; who will walk not simply up and down the narrow length of Palestine, but who will walk triumphantly over the hills and through the valleys of the universe, so that wherever He goes. the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame man shall leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing, so that wherever He goes, Nature shall cease from sighing : the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Thus is a mere historic Christianity of nearly two thousand years ago exchanged, by the Divine agency of the Spirit and the human agency of the Church working through the Spirit, into a vital Christianity which may be present in our lives, and present in other lives down to the end of time. The creeds of Christendom, therefore, follow the right order : "I believe in the Holy Ghost, I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The one is the power, the other the instrument by means of which we should be relieved from the perpetual necessity of looking back through the long mist of years to the white figure whom the cloud received out of the disciples' sight, and should find the Christ of God inwoven as it were into the very tissue of our being, and His life revealed not in perishable manuscripts, but in the unchanging scriptures of the heart.

But while the Providence of God thus requires all Christians

and all churches to continue as it were the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour as a record of contemporaneous history, it must never be forgotten that the theme will always be greater than those who try to write it. Christianity is that good thing committed to us, yet in its infinite proportions not to be measured by the utmost resources of our finite being. We look back with gratitude and devotion to the lives of the saints and prophets and martyrs who have witnessed a good confession, and are now entered into rest. We follow with kindling enthusiasm the intrepid spirits who feared not the dungeon and the stake; the uncomplaining victims of a life-long agony; the unselfish missionaries of the truth amid the darkness of the heathen world. We hold in reverence the godly conversation of those who walk among us still, and as salt of the earth, keep society from decay and corruption. Yet Christianity is still larger and better than any illustration which Christendom has seen of it. There is still plenty of room to put finishing touches upon our picture before it approaches the ideal copy from the Master's hand.

What arrogant presumption, therefore, it would be for the Church as a whole, much more for any branch of the Church, to claim that it was the infallible index of the Christian possibilities of the race, and consequently that outside the examples which it was able to produce, there could be no Christianity at all. Any one who has read the Gospels with care must have been struck with the extreme simplicity of organization, not only in the work of Christ Himself, but in the means He employed to continue it. We say rightly that He is the Founder of the Church, but in order to understand what is meant, we must strip the word of many of its modern associations. The Church which Christ established was nothing more or less than the company of men and women who had resolved to follow Him in His teaching and His life. They have no elaborate creed or confession of faith, no prescribed ritual of worship, no cast-iron rules in regard to time or place. The converts to the new faith are baptized at their reception in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and at frequent intervals the little band meets together to celebrate after the most humble fashion the sacrifice and death of their Lord. The whole emphasis of primitive Christianity is not upon the form, but upon the spirit.

Now it was inevitable that with the growth of the new religion, a more elaborate organization should be demanded, and that amid the natural divergences of human opinion there should gradually appear varieties in modes of worship, and in the statements of creed. The student of Church history knows that the terms "orthodox" and "heterodox" were bandied about between the leading camps of religious thought according as one party or the other gained the victory, and that the decree of Councils often determined who were worthy to be members of the Church of Christ. It is such easy work to find fault that no one can wonder that the mistakes and bigotries of ecclesiastical history have received their full share of attention, and scarcely need to be emphasized here. The special misfortune upon which I wish to insist just now is this, that in the midst of the polemics of the theologians, a great many things which were accidental and of quite secondary importance were exalted into the place of absolutely component elements of Christian life. The gnat of false doctrine was strained out with punctilious care, even though the camel of unrighteous character was swallowed without wincing. This in itself is bad enough: but when, forsooth, dissent in doctrine becomes the basis of excommunication the assumption of such a monopoly, were it not so painful, would be almost absurd. Had Christ been asked: What is a Christian? the answer would have been simple and plain: "The Christian is the one who follows Me," and the final test of discipleship would have been sought for in the life. But we know too well in what widely different ways the question has been virtualy answered at various periods of history, and how thoughtful men have been somewhat confused in the midst of conflicting theories, until, perhaps, they have come to doubt the reality of Christian profession altogether.

It must not be concluded, however, that creeds are valueless. They are right enough as long as they are kept in their proper place. While in other departments of thought, men are venturing without the slightest rebuke to express definite opinions, and sometimes in a very dogmatic fashion too, it is quite absurd to demand that in the realm of religion, unless we are prepared to be charged with narrow-mindedness, our ideas shall remain in a kind of haze. Creed is simply the crystallization of definite

thought. While there are many sides of Christian truth concerning which we can only hazard a conjecture, there are fundamental principles in regard to which we ought to be perfectly sure. But shall we make perplexity in faith or divergence of opinion from ourselves in regard to some religious mysteries the ground of rejection from the Church? Have we ever considered the difficulties which beset the earnest seeker after the highest forms of truth? The road to such orthodoxy as God will honour may be through painful questioning, through fierce temptation, through bitter agony and tears. We cannot accept in everything the guidance of the author of "Ecco Homo," but he speaks the truth when he says: "We ought to be just as tolerant of an imperfect creed as we are of an imperfect practice. Everything which can be urged in excuse for the latter may also be pleaded for the former. If the way to Christian action is beset by corrupt habits and misleading passions, the path to Christian truth is overgrown with prejudices and strewn with fallen theories and rotting systems which hide it from our view. It is quite as hard to think rightly as it is to act rightly, or even to feel rightly. And as all allow that an error is a less culpable thing than a crime or a vicious passion, it is monstrous that it should be more severely punished; it is monstrous that Christ, who was called the friend of publicans and sinners, should be represented as the pitiless enemy of bewildered seekers of truth * * Christ's first followers were far from possessing the full Christian belief. Not till long after His departure did they arrive at those conclusions which are now regarded as constituting religious theology."

And if, then, a true faith in Christ is not necessarily inconsistent with imperfect notions in regard to His person and doctrine, it becomes the duty of the Church, while earnestly endeavouring to unfold to such the way of God more perfectly, not to forbid those whom the Master would welcome, still less to pursue them with indignation and scorn. It is not more true that he who is a Churchman should be a Christian than that he who is a Christian should be welcomed as a Churchman. It is not your business or mine to make the gate of entrance narrower than Christ made it Himself. Why was He able to be so apparently careless in investigating the theological tenets of His disciples? Simply because He insisted always, so firmly yet so tenderly, upon the

one thing needful—the true devotion of the heart. What He asks of the erring and repentant Peter, He asks in effect of all: "Lovest thou me?" If the trembling lips can answer "Yea Lord" to that, it is enough.

Even if we are right in our doctrinal views, it by no means follows that another Church or another man who differs from us is wrong. He may be simply approaching the same great truth from another standpoint of vision, and what he says, so far from being antagonistic to what we say, may chance to be supplementtary to it. We are glad to hear the report of various travellers who have visited some marvel of nature. One of them perhaps, viewed it near at hand; another far off. One stood on the mountain; another in the plain. One regarded it exclusively by itself; another in its relations to surrounding objects. The accounts of these different travellers vary greatly. One spends his whole time in picturing what another never mentions at all; and each narrative is influenced by the personality of the observer, and his standpoint of vision. But so far from putting them over against each other in the relation of the false to the true, we are glad to have the accounts of all, because by joining them together we have the most complete representation of the object. And shall we be surprised that in view of the infinitude of truth, a similar thing should happen in regard to it? Until we are ourselves Omniscient, there will be more things in the religion of Jesus Christ than are compassed by our theology, however well articulated in its several parts, or minute in its metaphysical survey. It is not a bad sign that this age refuses to believe that the theologians know everything. It is a still better sign that they are coming to think so themselves. We want no more of the sharp anti-sceptical logic of the torture and the stake. We are not so eager as we once were to write *finis* upon any book of God. Unless we have given up thinking, we are not alarmed if the form of our religious ideas undergoes modification, and our whole perspective of truth is enlarged. We feel that while we must know what we believe, our creed need not add a number of miserable little Popes to the world by embracing the dogma of personal infallibility. We are content to conjure less with theological technicalities, and are finding out that the creed which avoids what Jeremy Taylor calls "curiosities of explication" is the surest

safeguard of the cause of truth, and the best friend to honest consciences.

And as long as we hold such views, it will not seem needful to try to reduce religious thought to a dead level of uniformity. While we are firm in our own convictions, we shall learn to respect the convictions of others; and if we believe them to be in error shall not attempt to coerce or abuse them, but shall employ only the weapons of love and reason. As long as men are men and not machines, you cannot, even if you would, reduce them to sameness of religious thought. There is all the difference in the world between uniformity and unity. There is no unity in the particles of a sand heap, and every wind scatters it whether it will. Yet they are alike in appearance. There is unity among the different members of our body, yet each differs in outward form. Now the Church of Christ is an organism, not an aggregation of particles. It is like the human body, not like the heap of sand. Its existence depends not on its uniformity, but on its multiform unity; and the effort, therefore, becomes as arrogant as it is absurd to measure the number of the faithful by antomation-like movements under the influence of ignorance or fear. We sadly need more reverence in this age, and more dutiful attention in religious teachers; but we need also more earnest personal thought to make us understand that our brother in Christ is not he who thinks exactly as we do, but he who sincerely desires to behold on earth the consummation of the Kingdom of God. Why, members of even the same Church are not quite like a row of houses. Within the same communion have been found men as diverse in thought as Wilberforce and Robertson, Pusey and Maurice, Newman and Dean Stanley; and the church that was broad enough for them ought not to find it difficult to believe that some outside forces may be equally Christian too. The Free-Churchman may doubt whether a member of the Old Kirk can possess the grace of God, and the Old Kirkman—for such things *have* happened—may return the compliment. But the fact remains that each party has done good service to Presbyterianism, and to the cause of truth. Even the Church of Rome, happily, does not secure that sameness in which it sometimes boasts, but exhibits many phases of religious opinion from extreme Ultramontanism to that free thought which while out-

wardly clinging to the fringes of the Church, scarcely accepts its teaching at all. And if somewhat different theological views may exist in the same communion, we surely are not going to divide on such momentous questions as the place of instrumental music in worship, or on the quantity of water to be used in baptism, or the right angle at which to say our prayers. If others choose to accept your views on these and kindred matters, well and good; if not, you surely have more sense than to quarrel with them, or to imagine yourself a martyr for conscience's sake, when you are simply a martyr to your own obstinacy. If we were to go on multiplying demoninations in that way, their name would soon be Legion—it is almost that already—and each would have a petty, stunted Shibboleth not large enough to fill the smallest corner of a good-sized human heart.

There is nothing disgraceful, however, in difference of opinion, as long as it is not made the basis of bickering and jealousy. Protestantism is sometimes reproached because of its bewildering variety of forms. They are bewildering, no doubt; and sometimes we make childish use of them. But while these variations may suggest less pleasing subjects for reflection, they are at least the evidence that we have not yet abandoned individual thought and effort; that we are not blind to the stern lessons of the past; that we claim the inalienable freedom of the human conscience, and refuse to be mummified into the ghastly uniformity of death. The reproach of Christendom does not lie in its diversity of operations, but in the fact that we do not yet seem to have penetrated below the surface, and grasped the indissoluble chain that binds it into one!

If, then, as I tried to show in a previous sermon,* Christianity appeals to the universal heart of mankind, the only warrant for the Church's permanence is her fidelity to her sacred mission While she clings to that, she must remain until her work is accomplished, and the Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our God, and of his Christ. No observant person can fail to see that this is a transitional epoch in religious thought. At no previous period, it seems to me, has there been greater earnestness in the investigation of the truths which govern human conduct here, and reach out into the realms of the unseen. Men

* The unpublished one of the present series (see Prefatory Note.)

whom, perhaps, we would not expect to find indulging in such pursuits, are thoughtfully looking into the question of duty, and trying to ascertain the will of God, and in many cases, I doubt not, will enter into their inheritance when the children of the Kingdom find themselves thrust out. At the same time alongside of this most hopeful zeal, there is a corresponding restlessness in presence of theological dogmas and confessions of faith. I dare say it would surprise us to know the real opinions of those who listen from Sabbath to Sabbath to the instructions of the Church, and are, perhaps, members of it. They are often startled themselves to find how far they have moved from the anchorage of childhood, and wonder, as they drift about upon the perilous sea of speculation, where they will land at last. Some good people are becoming nervous as they view these growing symptoms of dissent, and begin to feel like Elijah in the wilderness, that they are the only ones who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Is there occasion for such alarm? I think not. It is true that a wave of materialistic thought is sweeping over this Continent, and in many places is leaving its devastating mark. But this, believe me, is not destined to be the dominant influence of our age. Over against it there is growing slowly but surely the earnest conviction and the heroic purpose of men of all creeds and conditions who have determined, since they believe that God is true, to test the value of his truth in its application to the life of mankind. They do not pretend to have reached perfection either in creed or in conduct. They know in part and they prophesy in part. Building up their character on the great certitudes which already dwell within them, they are continually on the lookout for a still broader revelation. Seeing the darkness, the gloom, and the sin with eyes that ache at times in their anxious longing, they none the less see behind these things the buds of promise covering the green earth, the stars of hope shining in the blue sky, the prophesy of glorious resurrection deep-seated in the heart of humanity, deep-seated in the bosom of God.

If the strength of the Church lies solely in the correctness of her formulas, I do not know, nor would I care much what her future might be. But if the main strength of the Church lies in her character, in her harmony with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, then

her future is glorious with promise of victory. The least valuable part of our creed is that which is peculiar to ourselves; the most valuable that which we hold in common with all those who profess and call themselves Christians. We smile, perhaps, at the narrow bigotry of earlier ages. We honestly deplore, I hope, the mistaken zeal of many of the best men of the past whose virtues we can scarcely hope to emulate. But are we altogether free from the same spirit? The rack and the thumb-screw are now in the museum of curiosities. Have we put along with them ungenerous inuendo, the biting sneer, the self-satisfied intolerance? Let us be honest. We have not. There are still those who see very little hope of godliness outside the pale of their Communion, who recognize no orthodoxy save that which shouts their shibolleth, who are not content until they have supplemented Christ's tests of discipleship with a few little improvements of their own. Away with such childish folly! The secret of religion's consecrating influence cannot be wrapped up in the grave-clothes of any creed. Our definitions, however excellent they may be, are much smaller than the thing which they strive to define, and there is plenty of room for religious movements outside of them, and for diversities of thought under the same controlling spirit. Think of such men as Thomas a Kempis, Francis of Assisi, Tauler, Fenelon, Melanchton, George Herbert, John Knox, Wesley, Rutherford, Chalmers, Frederick Robertson, Channing—and then say whether the roll of the true saints in every age is not the supreme witness that Catholicity is possible. No attempt to set them in opposition to one another, no array of their alleged contradictions, no outcry against their unsoundness in the faith, can for a moment snatch from them the veneration of thankful hearts, or destroy the harmony of that chorus which from their separate voices float upward to the great white throne.

No one can estimate what the Church, in spite of all its imperfections, has already done for the amelioration of the world. If its work were of man, assailed as it has been by the brutal ferocity of enemies and sometimes, alas! by the coldness and insincerity of professed friends, it would long since have come to nought. But there is room for it to enter into still more vital sympathy with every phase of human life, and to estimate still more fully the value of every department of the revelation of God.

It cannot be doubted that the Church is in some degree responsible for the impression that Christianity is no essential factor in earthly affairs, and that over certain domains of being it has no sway at all. A sham battle has been fought between Science and Religion, and the most frantic efforts made to show that the God of nature and the God of revelation are not in harmony. It is a hopeful sign of the times that these errors are passing away; that the Church is learning to value the labours of Science, and that Science is learning to value the inspiration of the Church; that the settlement of theological disputes is being postponed in the zeal to cast out the demons from the weary hearts of men; that the immanence of God in all things is dawning upon our view like a new sun in the sky; that we are reading the canon of the larger Scriptures in the roll of the changeful centuries; that the Christ of the New Testament, dear as he is to us, is not more dear than the Christ who rises to-day in the regenerated life of the race, the Christ whom the parted cloud has brought back again, King of the realm of thought, King of the realm of action, His name above every name, Immanuel, God with us.

Well may the Church guard that good thing which was committed to her. It is true that the treasure is contained in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of man. If we look only at the strifes and divisions which still rend Christendom asunder we might cry:

"Wild, wild wind, wilt thou never cease thy sighing?
Dark, dark night, wilt thou never wear away?
Cold, cold Church, in thy death sleep lying,
The Lent is past, thy Passion here, but not thine Easter-day."

But there are other signs in the horizon, and from the hill-top of prophetic vision comes back the answer:

"Peace, faint heart, though the night be dark and sighing;
Rest, fair corpse, where thy Lord Himself hath lain.
Weep, dear Lord, above thy bride low lying;
Thy tears shall wake her frozen limbs to life and health again."